

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 IO-13 /070 W
-----116586 062107Z /73

R 061525Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6178
INFO AMEMBASSY LAGOS

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONROVIA 6169

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR, PGOV, NI, LI
SUBJECT: LIBERIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS NIGERIA

REFS: (A) STATE 208244 (B) LOME 0653 (C) MONROVIA 1114

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH LIBERIAN RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA ARE GENERALLY CONSIDERED GOOD, THEY ARE NOT WITHOUT THEIR PROBLEMS. LIBERIA, SENSITIVE TO ITS ROLE AS AFRICA'S OLDEST REPUBLIC, SOMETIMES RESENTS BEING UPSTAGED BY NIGERIA AND IS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT BEING DOMINATED ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY BY NIGERIA. LIBERIA IS AMBIVALENT ABOUT NIGERIA'S ROLE AS SPOKESMAN FOR AFRICA. IN CASES WHERE THERE EXISTS AN AFRICAN CONSENSUS, LIBERIA USUALLY WELCOMES NIGERIAN INITIATIVES IN SPEAKING FOR AFRICA. NONETHELESS SOME BITTERNESS REMAINS FROM CASES WHERE NIGERIA HAS ATTEMPTED TO PRESSURE LIBERIA TO MODIFY ITS MODERATE POSITIONS ON AFRICAN ISSUES. LIBERIA IS ALSO PROTECTIVE OF ITS HISTORICAL ROLE AS SPOKESMAN FOR BLACK AFRICA AND OF ITS SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES. THERE IS SOME RESENTMENT OF WHAT IS SEEN AS OPEN U.S. CULTIVATION OF NIGERIA TO THE DETRIMENT OF OUR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH LIBERIA.
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END SUMMARY.

1. LIBERIA STRIVES TO MAINTAIN EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH ALL AFRICAN COUNTRIES. RECOGNIZING NIGERIA AS THE REGIONAL POWER, LIBERIA PAYS SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ITS RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA IRRESPECTIVE OF THE INCUMBENT REGIME. GENERALLY OBASANJO IS WELL REGARDED BY

FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS WHO HAVE DEALT WITH HIM. FOREIGN MINISTER DENNIS IS SAID TO ENJOY A GOOD PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OBASANJO. GARBA IS LESS WELL LIKED. LIBERIAN OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN PLEASED WITH THE MODERATING ROLE PLAYED BY NIGERIA AT THE LAGOS ANTI-APARTHEID CONFERENCE AND AT THE LIBREVILLE OAU SUMMIT. RECENT MOVES TOWARD A RETURN TO CIVILIAN RULE IN NIGERIA HAVE ALSO BEEN WELCOMED IN MONROVIA. LIBERIA TRADITIONALLY FEELS MOST COMFORTABLE IN ITS DEALINGS WITH FREE ENTERPRISE, NON-MILITARY GOVERNMENTS. LIBERIA/NIGERIA RELATIONS WERE CLOSEST WITH THE CIVILIAN AZIKIWE GOVERNMENT.

2. GIVEN NIGERIA'S DISPROPORTIONATE WEALTH AND POPULATION, LIBERIA IS APPREHENSIVE THAT NIGERIA WILL ATTEMPT TO DOMINATE ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY OTHER WEST AFRICAN NATIONS. RECENT NIGERIAN MOVES AGAINST ROMEO HORTON, DIRECTOR OF THE ECOWAS FUND AND A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF PRESIDENT TOLBERT, HAVE BEEN POINTED TO AS AN EXAMPLE OF NIGERIA'S ATTEMPT TO BULLY THE SMALLER MEMBERS OF ECOWAS (REFTEL B). IN STRESSING ITS HISTORICAL ROLE AS THE OLDEST AND "MOST EXPERIENCED" AFRICAN STATE, LIBERIA IS ALSO AT TIMES PIQUED AT NOT BEING ACCORDED BY NIGERIA A LEADING ROLE IN INTRA-AFRICAN AFFAIRS. IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS LIBERIA AND NIGERIA HAVE OPENLY CLASHED ON SEVERAL

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ISSUES AS LIBERIA'S SENSITIVITIES WERE BRUISED BY NIGERIAN PRESSURE FOR LIBERIA TO MODIFY ITS MODERATE POLICIES. THIS WAS TRUE IN EARLY 1976 WHEN MURTALA CRITICIZED LIBERIA FOR NOT IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZING THE MPLA AS THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT OF ANGOLA. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY RESPONDED WITH A SHARP REBUTTAL STRESSING THAT LIBERIA WOULD "NOT ACCEPT ANY ATTEMPT, REGARDLESS OF SOURCE, TO INTERFERE WITH THE EXERCISE OF HER SOVEREIGN RIGHTS" (REFTEL C). OPEN NIGERIAN CRITICISM OF TOLBERT'S 1975 "DIALOGUE" WITH SOUTH AFRICA'S VORSTER ALSO PRODUCED A SOUR NOTE IN LIBERIAN/NIGERIAN RELATIONS. NONETHELESS LIBERIA IS USUALLY RESPECTFUL OF NIGERIAN POWER AND IS WILLING TO GRANT NIGERIA A LEADING POSITION IN AFRICAN AFFAIRS. IT IS RECOGNIZED THAT CLOSE RELATIONS WITH NIGERIA WILL SERVE LIBERIA'S OWN INTERESTS ON THE CONTINENT.

3. LIBERIA IS AMBIVALENT ABOUT NIGERIA'S ROLE AS A SPOKESMAN FOR AFRICA. IN CASES WHERE THERE EXISTS AN AFRICAN CONSENSUS, LIBERIA USUALLY WELCOMES NIGERIAN

INITIATIVES IN SPEAKING FOR AFRICA. THIS HAS BEEN
ESPECIALLY TRUE ON NORTH/SOUTH QUESTIONS AND ON STATE-
MENTS CRITICAL OF WESTERN ASSISTANCE AND INVESTMENT
IN SOUTH AFRICA. LIBERIA IS CAUTIOUS NOT TO JEOPARDIZE
IT'S ESPECIALLY CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES
AND WEST GERMANY BY VOCALLY CONDEMNING WESTERN POLICIES
FOR WHICH LIBERIA HAS LITTLE SYMPATHY. THE FOREIGN
MINISTRY'S DIRECTOR FOR AFRICAN AFFAIRS HAS COMMENTED
"WHEREAS NIGERIA CAN AFFORD TO INCUR WESTERN WRATH,
LIBERIA CANNOT". NONETHELESS LIBERIA IS PROTECTIVE OF
ITS HISTORICAL ROLE AS A SPOKESMAN FOR BLACK AFRICA AND
HIGHLY VALUES ITS SEATS ON THE GOVERNING BODIES OF
SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE
INTERNATIONAL LABOR CONFERENCE AND UNESCO.
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LIBERIA IS SUSPICIOUS OF NIGERIAN ATTEMPTS OT USURP
WHAT ARE SEEN AS LIBERIA'S HISTORICAL PREROGATIVES
AS AN AFRICAN SPOKESMAN IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS. THERE
IS A CERTAIN JEALOUSY THAT THE UNITED STATES IS ACCORD-
ING NIGERIAN LEADERS WHAT LIBERIA SEES AS A DISPRO-
PORTIONATE AMOUNT OF RESPECT. PRESIDENT TOLBERT, IN
ASPIRING TO THE ROLE OF SENIOR AFRICAN STATESMAN, HOLDS
TO THE BELIEF THAT LIBERIA IS UNIQUELY PLACED TO ACT
AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND
BLACK AFRICA. TO THE EXTENT THAT NIGERIA IS MORE CLOSELY
ASSOCIATED WITH U.S. ACTIONS IN AFRICA, LIBERI CAN
BE EXPECTED TO BE SOMEWHAT RESENTFUL OF THE UNITED
STATES FOR REDUCING THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR SPECIAL
RELATIONSHIP WITH "AMERICA'S BEST FRIEND IN AFRICA."
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 06-Sep-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MONROV06169
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770322-0775
Format: TEL
From: MONROVIA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770995/aaaadcgw.tel
Line Count: 151
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0319784d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 208244, 77 LOME 653, 77 MONROVIA 1114
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1378762
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LIBERIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS NIGERIA
TAGS: PINR, PGOV, NI, LI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0319784d-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009